

New Analysis Offers First-Ever State-by-State Look at Links Between Marriage, Fertility and Other Socioeconomic Characteristics

A new analysis looking at links between marriage, fertility and other socioeconomic characteristics was released today by the U.S. Census Bureau, providing the first-ever state-by-state analysis of median age at first marriage. The analysis of the multi-year marriage and fertility data from the American Community Survey (ACS) also shows how socioeconomic characteristics such as mother's income, age, work status and language spoken at home are correlated with birth rates.

The report, [*Indicators of Marriage and Fertility in the United States From the American Community Survey, 2000 to 2003*](#), found that states with a high estimated median age at first marriage tended to have higher proportions of unmarried-couple households and lower proportions of married-couple households.

"This study demonstrates the power of the American Community Survey to help us understand the kinds of changes taking place in the American family and what those changes mean," said Census Bureau Director Louis Kincannon. "These are the types of data that policymakers can use to more specifically target programs to strengthen the family."

The analysis of family structure variables showed marked geographic patterns. States in the Northeast had some of the highest levels of unmarried-couple households, particularly Maine (7.3 percent of all households), New Hampshire (7.2 percent) and Vermont (7.1 percent). States in the South, including Alabama (3.0 percent), Arkansas (3.6 percent) and Mississippi (3.8 percent), were among those with the lowest percentages of unmarried-partner households.

Southern states (and the District of Columbia) also tended to have a higher percentage of unwed mothers with infants compared with the national average. These included the District of Columbia (53.4 percent), Mississippi (45.7 percent) and Louisiana (40.2 percent of all mothers).

Among the states with the lowest percentages of unwed mothers with infants were Utah (14.7 percent), Minnesota (20.6 percent) and Idaho (21.6 percent).

Teen births were also more prevalent in the South, with Arkansas (where 13.3 percent of births were to teens), Mississippi (12.8 percent) and Louisiana (12.1 percent) among those above the national average (7.7 percent).

The analysis, from a sample of over 3 million covering four years of American Community Survey data (2000 – 2003), showed a link between the proportion of mothers with infants living below the poverty level and low levels of labor force participation, as well as a high proportion of teen births among unmarried mothers.

In fact, one in every two unmarried mothers who had recently given birth were living

below the poverty level — four times the rate of their married counterparts. Nearly 30 percent of all new mothers were unmarried.

Other highlights:

- Men and women in the Northeast marry later, on average, than their counterparts in the rest of the United States.
- One-fifth of all women who gave birth in California in the last year either did not speak English well or did not speak it at all. Texas (14.4 percent), Arizona (14.4 percent) and Nevada (14.2 percent) were among the states with rates higher than the national average (8.2 percent).
- Fifteen percent of all women who gave birth within the last year were noncitizens.

The American Community Survey is a powerful new tool designed to produce current local data for communities on a wide range of issues. The ACS is being mailed to about 250,000 (roughly 1-in-480) addresses a month, nationwide, and will provide current demographic, housing, social and economic information about America's communities every year — information previously available only once every 10 years.

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The American Community Survey data are based on responses from a sample of households across the nation. The estimates and rankings may vary from the actual values because of sampling or nonsampling variations. The statistical statements have undergone testing, and comparisons are significant at the 90-percent confidence level. Additional information and data profiles for the nation, states, counties and places may be accessed at <<http://www.census.gov/acs>> or <<http://factfinder.census.gov>>.

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